Improving Missouri High Schools

A Report of the
Commissioner's Study Group on
High School Reform

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
D. Kent King, Commissioner of Education
February 2006

This report is an outgrowth of the work of the Missouri High School Task Force, a statewide advisory group that I appointed in 2004 and asked to recommend policy changes that would benefit our high school students in the future. The task force completed its work and presented its recommendations to the State Board of Education in early 2005.

One of the task force's recommendations called for the development of "guiding principles" that could help Missouri schools pursue their own improvement efforts. As a result, I appointed a small "study group" to continue the discussions that began with the task force. This document is the product of the study group's efforts.

I am grateful to all the Missourians who contributed to the work of the High School Task Force and the study group. On behalf of the State Board of Education, we are happy to make this report available to local school officials. We hope it provides a practical tool for self-evaluation and a stimulus for many schools to pursue in-depth study of their programs, practices, policies and goals for the future.

A school or school district that wants to tackle the challenge of changing the high school experience can find many sources of support. We encourage local school leaders to seek advice through the Regional Professional Development Centers, the Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, local universities and national reform groups. The readings listed at the end of this report were specifically selected because they are readily available and can offer practical guidance for your school improvement team.

Public schools face many challenges today. One of the greatest is to make high schools more academically demanding, more relevant and more enriching for all young people. I hope this report will help your school focus on its future and the steps it might take to create new opportunities for students.

D. Kent King
Missouri Commissioner of Education

Table of Contents

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education gratefully acknowledges the work of the members of the High School Reform Study Group who contributed to this report.

Acknowledgments

Introduction

In the spring of 2004, Missouri Commissioner of Education D. Kent King appointed a 28-member task force to study high school education in Missouri and make recommendations for possible changes in state policy. The task force met monthly from May 2004 to March 2005, studying a variety of reports and hearing presentations from experts about state and national issues that could positively influence high school education over the next decade.

The task force presented a report to the State Board of Education on April 22, 2005, that included three recommendations:

1. Increase the minimum number of credits required for graduation from 22 to 24 units.
2. Implement a non-high-stakes graduation assessment.
3. Design a two-tiered diploma program, differentiating diplomas by the number of credits a student earned and a specified score on the exit assessment.

The task force recommended that the policy recommendations go into effect for the graduates of 2010. In June of 2005, the State Board of Education adopted a proposed policy to implement the first of the task force's recommendations. The other two recommendations from the task force were still being studied at the time this report was written. In October 2005, following a formal public comment period, the State Board of Education adopted a regulation to implement the new minimum requirements for graduation, effective for the Class of 2010.

The High School Task Force also recommended that "principles of reform" be written to support the efforts of Missouri high schools as they strive to become schools that will effectively address the needs of tomorrow's students. As a result, the Commissioner of Education appointed a small "study group" to continue the discussions that began with the High School Task Force and suggest "guiding principles" for local reform initiatives. This document is the result of the study group's efforts.

This report provides suggested questions to guide improvement efforts by individual schools. The questions are organized around "processes" for improvement and "areas of focus" for improvement. This guide is not intended to offer an exhaustive list of processes or areas of focus, but to provide enough suggestions and examples to support an individual school's continuous improvement efforts, whether initiating an improvement process or assessing efforts already in progress.

Why Reform High Schools?

The need for reform can be best understood by considering the responsibilities of high schools to prepare students for the fast-changing economic, technological, demographic and political conditions in Missouri, the nation and the world. Some experts caution that today's educational system faces irrelevance unless educators find ways to bridge the chasm between how all students live today and will live in the future and how they study and learn in today's high schools.

Such admonitions are grounded in fact (Achieve, 2004a; Achieve, 2004b; Achieve, 2005; ACT, 2004; American Diploma Project, 2004; Gates Foundation, 2003; Gayler, Chudowsky, Hamilton, Kober, & Yeager, 2004; Kazis, Pennington, & Conklin, 2003; Martinez & Bray, 2002). Some writers estimate that today's high schools effectively serve as few as 30% and as many as 50% of students. Other reports note that only 70% of public high school students graduate and as few as 32% leave high school qualified to attend a four-year college. Only 51% of African-American students and 52% of Hispanic students graduate, and only 20% and 16%, respectively, leave high school college-ready (Greene & Forster, 2003).

"If all ethnic groups had the same educational attainment and earnings as whites, total personal income in the state [Missouri] would be about $1 billion higher, and the state would realize an estimated $357 million in additional tax revenues" (National Center for Public Policy in Education, 2004, p.11). "The median earnings of a high school graduate are 43% higher than those of a non-graduate, and those of a college graduate are 62% higher than those of a high school graduate" (Achieve, 2005, p.7; see also Carnevale & Desrochers, 2001, pp.53-4). Clearly, the success, or lack thereof, of America's high schools is not only a matter of educational interest, but one of economic interest as well. Further, a well-educated society is fundamental for a democratic society.

Increasingly, school success is being judged by student achievement on mandated standardized tests. There is a growing emphasis on closing the achievement gap between various subgroups such as English language learners, students with special needs, and students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. No Child Left Behind, new state graduation requirements, and increased public expectations at the local level all contribute to the need for reform.

All students have individual needs, interests, strengths and ideas about success. It is incumbent on school leaders to facilitate the incorporation of these personal characteristics into a research-based program of instruction and learning that equips all students with the skills and knowledge necessary to function in the 21st century, including but not limited to:

- Strong academic skills equivalent to what will be needed in the near and distant future to enter postsecondary education or to advance in the workplace.
- An interest and capacity to be a lifelong learner/teacher.
- Knowledge of self …
    o Self-discipline
    o Self-confidence
    o Self-advocate
- The capacity to be a contributor to the community and the world.

We are no longer an industrial society with the need to prepare students to fit into that form of work environment. We have become an information- and service-based society that requires different skills from the industrial society of years past. We must ask questions about the processes we use to improve and the areas of focus that

will enable our students to adapt to the constantly changing environment in which they will live. These are questions that all educators must consider if they wish to provide the optimum schooling experience for their students.

16 Guiding Questions

To promote dialogue and an understanding of the need for school improvement, the following questions may be used. The first eight questions are about processes for school improvement. The second eight questions are about areas of focus for improvement. These questions are discussed at length in the following pages.

Processes

1. Have we developed a meaningful set of school values, beliefs and commitments, and do we revisit those statements periodically?
2. Have we developed a mission statement for the school and established a vision of what the school should look like in three to five years? Do we revisit that vision annually?
3. Have we developed an annual improvement plan that includes goals and strategies for accomplishing each goal?
4. Do we monitor the implementation of school improvement plans?
5. Do our school leaders – specifically principals and teacher leaders – function as group facilitators?
6. Do we have a team of teacher-leaders and principals working collaboratively who provide the leadership for change across the school?
7. Do we engage in ongoing professional development that addresses the school's vision?

8. Do we have a caring, collaborative culture and a trusting, respectful climate that provides the environment for continuous improvement?

Areas of Focus

1. Are all individuals who work directly with students grounded in the knowledge of adolescent development and skilled in how to relate effectively and professionally to today's students?
2. Do we provide a curriculum that meets state standards and grade-level expectations; is rigorous and challenging for all learners; is relevant to learner needs and interests; and effectively prepares each student for a post-high school experience?
3. Do we provide instruction that is aligned with the curriculum and utilizes authentic, problem-based and differentiated teaching methods that mentally engage all students?
4. Do we use assessment tools that are aligned with curriculum and instruction and that provide formative and summative data to inform future instruction for each student?
5. Is our school organized in a manner that creates small learning communities and provides each student with a personalized plan of study?
6. Do all of our students have access to career and technical courses, either at the local high school or an area career center?
7. Do we integrate technology throughout our school's curriculum?
8. Are parents our partners in their students' educational experiences?

The most meaningful, lasting change occurs when a school looks inward and realizes the need to change. Conditions that foster reflection and consideration of the difficult questions form the foundation upon which schools improve. Understanding how to proceed with change is just as critical to success as deciding what to change. Without the proper approach to *how*, the risk is much greater that *what* is changed will not make a difference for students.

1. Have we developed a meaningful set of school values, beliefs, and commitments, and do we revisit those statements periodically?

Values are what we hold dear; beliefs are what we think are truths; commitments are what we are willing to work toward because they are in the best interest of the students and school. Understanding what the faculty, staff and administration collectively value and believe about teaching and learning, collaboration, shared leadership, student success, working conditions, parents and community, state assessment data and other issues directly associated with successful education is the starting point for meaningful change.

Once values and beliefs are defined, developing a list of commitments provides guidance and establishes expectations for all. The development of the statements must occur through purposeful discussions where faculty, staff and administration share their thoughts and achieve consensus. The statements must be evident across the school so everyone is consistently exposed to them. They must be revisited periodically so new faculty and staff can understand existing expectations and have the opportunity to contribute to refined expectations. Periodic review also allows for the evolution of the statements as knowledge about best practice grows and as everyone learns through successful experiences.

2. Have we developed a mission statement for the school and established a vision of what the school should look like in three to five years? Do we revisit that vision annually?

The mission and vision will serve as the compass for student success. The mission defines the school's purpose or "reason for being." The mission is a relatively short statement that can be easily remembered by members of the organization. It is a "guiding light" that keeps the school on course. It should be a relatively stable statement that seldom changes.

The vision describes, through a narrative with several major points, what the school should be in three to five years. An effective vision is based on an understanding of best educational practices, and it reflects the values, beliefs and commitments of the staff. The vision is an ever-evolving statement that fits the changing needs of the school. The vision is revisited annually. As portions of the vision are accomplished, new conceptions are established to guide the school. When the vision, mission, values, beliefs and commitment statements are student-centered, they effectively guide the daily work and decisions across the school.

Questions About Processes

3. Have we developed an annual improvement plan that includes goals and strategies for accomplishing each goal?

A well-written vision establishes several major areas for improvement. One or more goal statements are usually necessary to address each major concept in the vision. Once a goal is accomplished, the school has moved one step closer to achieving the current vision. The vision is the image that guides change; the goals and strategies are the means to make that image a reality. Existing data about the school are used in goal development to benchmark progress and expectations.

Meaningful reform occurs when all members of the faculty, staff and administration are involved in the development of the annual improvement plan. Students and parents also may be included in developing parts of the plan. All stakeholders – and especially teachers – must be involved because the changes that most directly make a difference in student achievement are the curricular and instructional activities of the teachers. To value the need for growth, teachers must be directly involved in the development and implementation of the plan. If not, the plan is unlikely to foster lasting change because faculty will not be committed to its successful implementation.

In most strategic-planning scenarios, goals and strategies are developed by committees and then individuals making the changes necessary to achieve the goals. In systemic planning, all faculty, staff and administrators participate in the development of each goal and strategy so they see the comprehensive picture

of change and understand the role they can play in accomplishing the plan. Such involvement takes more time but has greater payoff and, in the long run, saves time.

4. Do we monitor the implementation of school improvement plans?

Ongoing collection of information and regular updates about progress toward established goals are a part of the routines in highly successful schools. Faculty, staff and administrators should closely monitor improvement plans and discuss progress regularly. At the very least, the school improvement team informs the faculty periodically. At the very best, the faculty, staff and administrators discuss progress toward each goal on a regular basis during faculty meetings or work sessions. With regular discussions comes the opportunity to celebrate accomplishments and ponder how to address the challenges. Momentum is maintained at a steady, acceptable pace, and personnel develop an understanding of the importance of persistence, personal commitment and participation.

5. Do school leaders – specifically principals and teacher leaders – function as group facilitators?

Throughout the process of effective change, teachers, staff and administrators are directly involved in the design and implementation of change. Someone has to lead the discussions, the work sessions, the committees and the task forces. Facilitating the interactions that are continually necessary for the whole faculty and for small groups is a vital skill that should be developed by those in leadership roles. Carrying out the processes of school

improvement is extremely difficult without personnel who have such facilitation skills.

6. Do we have a team of teacher-leaders and principals working collaboratively who provide the leadership for change across the school?

Change has to be led and coordinated by an individual or group of individuals. If leadership is left to one individual, it dissolves when that person is not available to lead, has too much to do, or leaves. Even the most capable and charismatic leaders need to distribute leadership to a nucleus of teachers who are able to lead the school in continuous change. This nucleus of teacher-leaders should be respected by their peers; willing to study best practice; open to the research about best practice; and willing to devote extra time and energy to providing leadership for the school. A collaborative, team approach between the principal and teacher-leaders provides the formula for successful change.

7. Do we engage in ongoing professional development that addresses the school's vision?

The value of professional development is obvious, but what is less obvious is who should be involved in the design of the professional development. If a school is to change based upon a vision and set of goals, it is logical that the professional development be linked to the vision and goals. When implementation plans are designed (Question 3), professional development should be defined. If the school is to have a culture of collaboration, faculty must be involved in making decisions about professional development. While district needs must be met, school-level professional development

needs must not be displaced. In effective schools, building and the district personnel collaborate to meet the professional development needs of the district and the building.

8. Do we have a caring, collaborative culture and a trusting, respectful climate that provides the environment for continuous improvement?

The school's culture is based upon the norms of behavior and the assumptions that shape behavior. Culture is "the way we do things around here." If that culture is caring and collaborative, individuals learn from and trust one another. They think and work together for the good of the school and with student success in mind. The school's climate is based upon the perceptions and feelings of individuals about the work environment in the school. Climate is shaped by the relationships among individuals in the school. A positive climate exists where trust and respect have been developed and become a normal part of the school environment.

Culture is to an organization what personality is to an individual; climate is to an organization what attitude is to an individual. If the culture is not caring and collaborative and the climate is not trusting and respectful, the school struggles with change. Engaging faculty, staff and administrators in the discussions and tasks necessary to address Questions 1-7 can help develop a positive culture and climate. In turn, having a positive culture and climate will make the work of school improvement much easier. The processes for change foster quality culture and climate, and quality culture and climate support the processes for change. It's symbiotic.

Processes for School Improvement:
Recommended vs. Typical Practices

This chart contrasts the eight recommended processes for school improvement with the way these processes are commonly carried out in the high schools of Missouri and the nation. This table can serve as a stimulus for thought, discussion and self-assessment with faculty and staff.

Recommended Practices	Typical Practices
Develop a set of school values, beliefs and commitments for the school. Revisit those statements periodically.	Values or beliefs were once developed and are often forgotten. Commitments are not discussed and were not collaboratively developed.
Develop a mission statement and, most importantly, a vision of what the school should look like in 3-5 years; revisit that vision annually.	The mission is a catchy statement with little meaning. A true vision was never developed, much less designed to guide the school's development.
Develop an annual improvement plan that includes a set of goals and strategies for accomplishing each goal.	The improvement plan meets the state's basic requirements. It is usually written by administrators with little teacher input.
Monitor and discuss the implementation of improvement plans.	Plans are discussed only when it's time to write a new plan or prepare for a state accreditation visit.
Build the skills of administrators and teacher leaders to function as group facilitators.	Meetings are seldom facilitated so they are active, engaging and productive learning experiences.
Develop teacher-leaders and administrators who can collaborate to provide the leadership for change across the school.	Principals – sometimes department chairs or team leaders – serve as leaders for all change; they get paid to lead.
Provide ongoing professional development that addresses the school's vision and school improvement goals.	The district dominates professional development days. The school gets what's left, which usually is not much.
Provide the environment for improvement by establishing a caring, collaborative culture and a trusting, respectful climate.	Culture and climate are dependent on the principal. Collegiality is present, but collaboration is artificial. Caring and trust fluctuate. Respect is limited to close friends.

What should our faculty study? How do we know what practices are the most appropriate for our faculty? Where do we find information about the issues we should discuss and write into our school vision? While this section does not provide definitive answers, it suggests specific areas of focus a faculty should consider in the process of evaluating existing practices and designing the vision, goals and strategies for continuous school improvement.

1. Are all individuals who work directly with students grounded in the knowledge of adolescent development and skilled in how to relate effectively and professionally to today's students?

This does not mean that adults begin to act and think like students. On the contrary, adults are responsible for helping students develop and mature. That role implies an understanding of what motivates students, what their social and emotional life is like, and what strategies can be used to build constructive relationships with each student. The facts about access and involvement with drugs, alcohol, sex, crime and other issues confronting students are staggering to a generation of adults who went through adolescence in a very different environment. Yet many adults who work with students are neither aware of the facts and issues nor prepared to build a professional teacher-student relationship with youth who appear very different – and often indifferent.

To work effectively the adult must earn the student's respect; to earn respect the adult must build a relationship of mutual respect with the student; to build the relationship the adult must sincerely care about each individual student and his/her development and success. Faculty must develop an understanding of adolescents and their lives to build the capacity to relate to the students of today.

2. Do we provide a curriculum that meets state standards and grade-level expectations; is rigorous and challenging for all learners; is relevant to learner needs and interests; and effectively prepares each student for a post-high school experience?

Students should be encouraged to exceed state minimum requirements and select courses and learning experiences that will prepare them for real life. Courses should be designed to meet state standards rather than promote "seat-time." Curriculum should be integrated when feasible to match the realities of life where disciplines are blended throughout life. Tracking and ability grouping should be avoided, and students with special education needs should learn in the same stimulating and challenging environment as all other students.

All teachers should have deep knowledge in their content area so they can implement a curriculum that is rigorous and challenging for all learners. Depth of content knowledge provides greater assurance that learning will be relevant, address students' needs and interests, and prepare students effectively for their post-high school experiences.

Questions About Areas of Focus

3. Do we provide instruction that is aligned with the curriculum and utilizes authentic, problem-based, and differentiated teaching methods that mentally engage all students?

Hands-on, meaningful learning experiences that promote higher-order thought and capture the interest of students should be used to deliver the curriculum. Teachers should be creative in their approaches to instruction. Flexible scheduling supports creative instruction. Consider the use of "lab" and "seminar" blocks of time to implement personalized learning.

Instructional time should provide opportunities for remediation, maintenance and enrichment to meet individual student needs. Students should be involved in discussions and decisions about instructional strategies that fit their needs and interests. Active learning is significantly more productive than seatwork and worksheets.

4. Do we use assessment tools that are aligned with curriculum and instruction and that provide formative and summative data to inform future instruction for each student?

Assessment should occur regularly, especially at the conclusion of learning units that cover content the students should master. Common unit assessments, given at the end of each instructional unit or section of learning by all who teach that specific content, and more formal tests, given periodically and designed to mimic statewide assessments that provide data about mastery, should be used throughout the core content areas so curricular and instructional adjustments to fit students'

needs can be made immediately. High schools students, especially, should also be involved in discussions and decisions about the best types of assessments to measure mastery of core content.

5. Is our school organized in a manner that creates small learning communities and provides each student with a personalized plan of study?

Provide a personal learning environment for students while providing teachers with a more supportive and collaborative working climate. Each student should have a personalized plan of study that is flexible and rigorous in content and relevant to the goals and future plans of the student. Each student should have an adult advocate. Each student should feel a part of a larger school community without feeling lost within that the community.

Analyze teacher-student contact loads. Design a learning community that provides teachers with flexible time to work with students outside regular class sessions and supports personalized learning experiences. Provide time for all students to engage in small- and large-group seminars, individual study, research, projects, tutoring and other learning experiences outside the regular classroom.

Designing such an environment may require re-thinking of students' and teachers' schedules throughout the school day. It also requires that counselors engage with students in accord with the state's comprehensive guidance program, working with teachers, students and parents to develop each student's personal plan of study.

6. Do all of our students have access to career and technical courses, either at the local high school or an area career center?
Career-technical education should be available to all students. Programs should be rigorous and relevant, taught by staff skilled in the use of best instructional practices. Education, career preparation, skill development and lifelong learning are connected to individual success.

Missouri will continue to need a highly skilled workforce with strong academic, occupational and technical abilities. The skill demands for work and postsecondary education are converging, with common skills needed for success in postsecondary education and careers.

Local high school faculty and career center faculty should work collaboratively to coordinate programs that best support students' interests and needs. Schools should continually consider ways to modify or expand curriculum to meet students' needs for college or careers. Coordination between the curriculum of the local high school and the career center should be evident and support the accomplishment of core content standards and grade-level expectations.

7. Do we integrate technology throughout our school's curriculum?
Instruction in all content areas should seek ways to use technology in the learning experiences. Students should have electronic access to faculty and instruction, such as assignments, assessments, instructional activities, resource materials and tutorial support. Distance-learning can be used to expand curriculum, particularly in schools with limited faculty and course offerings. Parents can be provided access to lesson assignments, student work and other information regarding their students' educational program.

8. Are parents our partners in their students' educational experiences?
Educators must aggressively and positively reach out to parents and build relationships that will support the student's learning. Educators must establish regular methods of communication with all parents and specific methods with parents of students who are struggling. Home visits are a common, but insufficient starting point to build parent-teacher-student relationships.

An environment and a relationship must be cultivated based upon a common interest of success for each student. Even if parents are ambivalent, educators must be persistent in efforts to build the relationship. For high school students who are emancipated or not residing with parents or guardians, the school must work closely with social service agencies to support the educational success of each student.

Areas of Focus for School Improvement:
Recommended vs. Typical Practices

This chart compares and contrasts the ways in which faculty, staff and administrators may approach the areas of focus that are critical to the success of school improvement efforts. These observations can serve as a stimulus for thought, discussion and self-assessment.

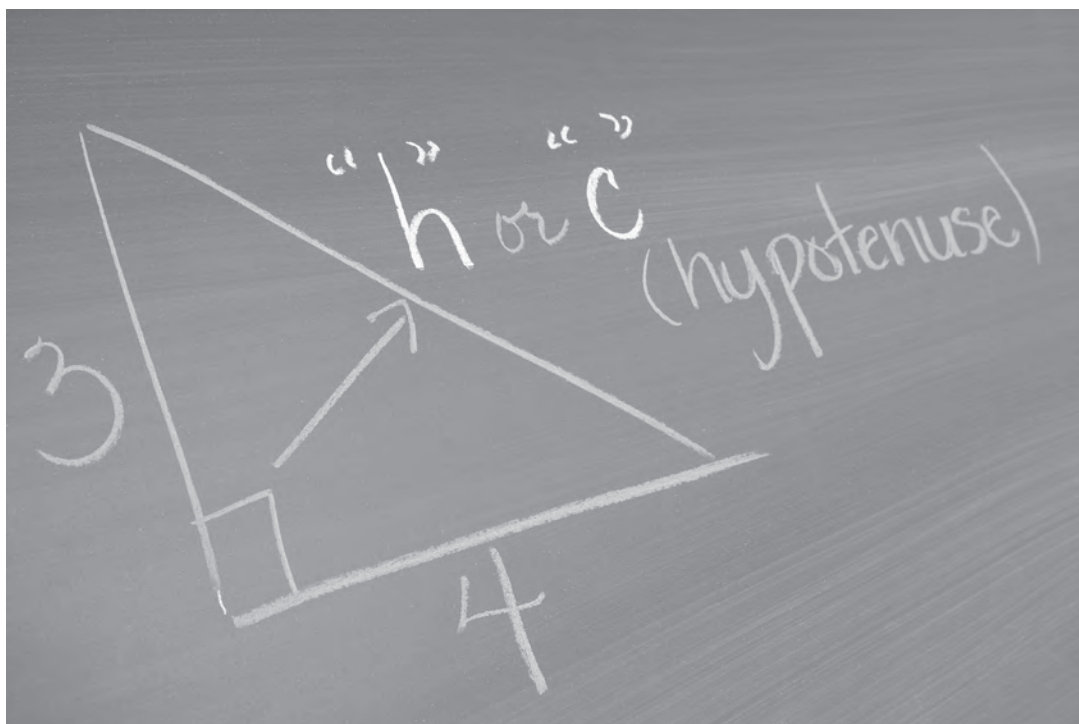| Recommended Practices	Typical Practices
Create opportunities for all who work with students to study adolescent development and develop skill in relating effectively and professionally to today's students.	Educators believe they understand students because they are around them every day. Therefore, they are reluctant to invest time developing a deeper understanding of the challenges the students face.
Implement a curriculum taught by knowledgeable teachers that meets state standards and grade-level expectations; is challenging for all learners; is relevant to learner needs and interests; and effectively prepares each student for a post-high school experience.	Courses are based on traditional content and formats that may have been used for years and may be taught by staff with marginal expertise. Students are "sorted" based upon ability. All students do not receive the same basic curriculum. Students infrequently take coursework beyond what is required.
Implement instruction that is aligned with the curriculum and that emphasizes authentic, problem-based and differentiated teaching methods that will engage all students.	Some teachers teach today the way they taught years ago. Much instruction is based on worksheets and textbook questions. Learning is static, not dynamic.
Assessment tools and methods are aligned with the curriculum and instruction. Assessments provide formative and summative data to guide future instruction for each student.	Assessment emphasizes recall in the form of end-of-chapter tests. Authentic assessments and demonstrations are viewed as lacking rigor. Tests provide scores for a grade book; they do not inform instruction, remediation or enrichment.
Organize the school in a manner that creates small, personal learning communities. Provide opportunities for each student to develop a personalized plan of study that is reviewed and revised on a regular basis with the support of teachers, counselors and parents.	Students seldom have the opportunity to develop programs of study that are relevant to their needs and that are reviewed regularly. Large schools seldom downsize into smaller units. Schedules seldom provide time for learning outside the regular classroom (seminars, research projects, independent study, off-campus mentored learning, etc.).

Provide students with access to rigorous and relevant career-technology programs at the local high school or area career center.

Students who take career education courses seldom take college-prep courses and thus miss important learning experiences. Students who take college-prep courses miss practical learning experiences that could broaden their perspective and engage their interest.

Integrate the use of technology throughout the school's curriculum.

Technology is taught in the technology classroom where students take classes or teachers take their classes to do research or write reports.

Develop partnerships with parents that support student's educational experiences.

Parents attend school activities if their students are participating; they seldom meet school personnel unless their student is a behavior problem.

Getting Started

Here are seven frequently asked questions to help your school improvement team begin – and sustain – the hard work of creating a realistic plan for school change and continuous improvement.

1. What data should be collected to define the school's academic performance, culture and expectations?

- ACT/SAT scores and other national assessment scores

- State assessment scores

- Teacher assessments

- Grade distributions

- Attendance/tardiness/dropout statistics

- Student behavior/discipline data

- Special education referrals and plans

- Employer feedback

- Enrollment and performance data from students in four-year and two-year schools

- Teachers' perceptions about school culture and climate

- Students' perception about the school and the quality of education they are experiencing

- Parents' perceptions about the school and the quality of education their students are experiencing

- Community perceptions about the quality of the school's programs and the school's graduates

2. How do we establish a nucleus of leadership for improvement?

- Establish a school improvement team. The purpose of the team is to really lead the faculty in change, which means more than completing a report or preparing for the state accreditation (MSIP) review.

- Select teachers for the team with leadership potential – colleagues who are respected by peers and open to new knowledge and best practices.

- Establish a regular meeting schedule for the team.

- Create a profile of the school using existing data (as outlined above) for the team to study.

- Educate team members, as a group, about school-improvement processes, how to lead change, and about best practices in high school education.

3. How do we get the entire faculty and staff involved?

- Initiate honest and open discussions as a faculty about the importance of continuous improvement to better serve students.

- The school improvement team and the principal should work together to design and lead faculty work sessions to build knowledge and begin to define issues for improvement.

- Provide suggested readings and lead discussions about those readings.

- Share and discuss data profiles with all faculty; then define issues and begin to think about long-term solutions.

- Select only one or two issues for improvement at a time.

4. How do we get a meaningful school improvement plan in place to guide our school?
- Carefully read and discuss Questions 1-3 in the "processes" section of this document.

- Establish work sessions led by the school improvement team to discuss and accomplish the concepts presented in those first three questions.

- Engage all faculty in the discussion, design and implementation of the plan.

- Maintain faculty attention to the ongoing work for the plan. Discuss the successes and struggles that result from that work.

5. How do we work with those on our faculty who do not see the value of the school improvement effort?
- Accept it as normal that not every member of the faculty will see the value of continuous school improvement. Start by building a foundation among those who do and working to help other faculty see the importance of continuous improvement.

- Be patient and observe that more and more faculty will see the benefit of the school improvement effort as meaningful discussions occur, as successes and struggles are discussed, and as knowledge about best practices begins to grow across the faculty.

- Remember that the change process begins with strong leadership by the principal and a nucleus of staff members and evolves from there. Within a year or two, the number of faculty who are still struggling with support and commitment to improve should be a very small percent of the faculty.

- If a significant number of the faculty members are still reluctant after a year or two, reconsider how you are approaching change. Look for help from outside expertise. Collect data about the school's culture and climate so the faculty members have concrete information to discuss and consider as they reflect upon their struggles to improve.

6. Other than student achievement data, how do we know if we are making progress with our improvement efforts?
- Collect and monitor a variety of data as suggested in Question 1 above. Always engage the whole faculty in the analysis and discussion of these data.

- Design strategies that enable school personnel to talk with and listen to parents and community members, as well as current and recent graduates. Take notes and study what is learned.

- Seek help from external evaluators if there is not expertise within the district to help design methods to collect and analyze varied forms of information.

7. How do we find the time to maintain a school improvement process when we already have such a full plate?

- Work smarter, not harder. Designing an improvement plan will allow the school to prioritize the critical elements for improvement and focus energy on those issues.

- Engaging all faculty pools the thinking and disperses the responsibilities needed to establish a culture of continuous improvement.

- Accept the fact that this is a journey, not a race. The journey is constant and never-ending.

- Don't hit it so hard initially that everyone burns out in six months. Begin at a steady, bearable pace and keep moving. As your school makes progress, culture begins to change, and future progress becomes easier.

- Getting started is difficult, but maintaining a steady pace will be just as challenging. Be patient and persistent.

A Call to Action: Transforming High School for All Youth, National High School Alliance, 2005. *www.hsalliance.org*

An Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools, Achieve, Inc., 2005. *www.achieve.org*

Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution, National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1996. *www.principals.org*

Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform, National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004. *www.principals.org*

Crisis or Possibility: Conversations about the American High School. National High School Alliance, 2004. *www.hsalliance.org*

High Schools that Work, An Enhanced Design to Get All Students to Standards. Southern Regional Education Board, 2005. *www.sreb.org*

Life After High School: Young People Talk About Their Hopes and Prospects, Public Agenda, 2005. *www.publicagenda.org*

Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement, DuFour, R. & Eaker, R. (1998). National Education Service, *www.nationaleducationservice.com*

Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts, The American Diploma Project, 2004. *www.achieve.org*

Successful Schools: What Makes them Work. Daggett, W. (2005) International Center for Leadership in Education, *www.daggett.com*

Supporting Principals Who Break Ranks (policy paper), National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004. *www.principals.org*

The Productive High School: Creating Personalized Academic Communities, Murphy, J., Beck, L., Crawford, M., Hodges, A., & McGaughy, C. (2001). Corwin Press, *www.corwinpress.com*

Resources & References

Sources

Achieve, Inc. (2004a). The expectations gap: A 50-state review of high school graduation requirements. Washington, D. C.: Achieve, Inc.

Achieve, Inc. (2004b). Do graduation tests measure up? A closer look at state high school exit exams. Washington, D. C.: Achieve, Inc.

Achieve, Inc. (2005). 2005 National education summit on high schools. Washington, D. C.: Achieve, Inc.

ACT. (2004). Crisis at the core: Preparing all students for college and work. Iowa City, IA: ACT.

American Diploma Project. (2004). Ready or not: Creating a high school diploma that counts. Washington, D. C.: Achieve, Inc.

Carnevale, A. P. & Desrochers, D. M. (2001). Help wanted ... credentials required: Community colleges in the knowledge economy. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Gates Foundation (2003). Closing the graduation gap: Toward high schools that prepare all students for college, work, and citizenship. Seattle, WA: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Retrieved March 31, 2005, from *http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/ downloads/ed/policy.pdf*

Gayler, K. Chudowsky, N., Hamilton, M., Kober, N., & Yeager, M. (2004). State high school exit exams: A maturing reform. Washington, D. C.: Center on Education Policy.

Greene, J. P. & Forster, G. (2003). Public high school graduation and college readiness rates in the United States. N.Y.: Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute.

Kazis, R., Pennington, H., & Conklin, K. D. (2003). Ready for tomorrow: Helping all students achieve secondary and post-secondary success. Washington, D. C.: National Governors Association.

Martinez, M. & Bray, J. (2002). All over the map: State policies to improve the high school. Washington, D. C.: National Alliance for the American High School.

National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. (2004). Measuring up 2004: The state report card on higher education, Missouri. (National Center Report #04-4). San Jose, CA: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. Retrieved March 31, 2005, from *http://measuringup.highereducation.org/docs/statereports/MO04.pdf*

http://dese.mo.gov